

Should Police and Crime Commissioners be abolished? The Commissioners respond

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By Democratic Audit UK

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This week the report of the Independent Police Commission, led by the former Metropolitan Police Commissioner John Stevens and commissioned by the Labour Party, was [published](#). One of its key proposals was for the abolition of the post of Police and Crime Commissioner, introduced in 2012 to establish a new form of democratic oversight of the police. In this post we ask serving Commissioners to respond to the proposal.

[Katy Bourne](#), Sussex Police and Crime Commissioner (Conservative)

What the [report](#) fails to recognise is the strengths of Police and Crime Commissioners and some of the very good work that has been carried out across the political divide just 12 months into what is a brand new role. We've set Police and Crime Plans with clear priorities and objectives that reflect local issues.



One of the most important and unprecedented roles of PCCs is to hold Chief Constables to account on behalf of the public yet this is only touched on briefly in Lord Steven's report, which I find astounding. In Sussex I hold monthly accountability meetings with the Chief Constable, which are webcast live. One of these meetings specifically focused on the policing operation in response to the protest against test-drilling in Balcombe and this effective form of scrutiny has been recognised nationally by the Policing Minister.

The report suggests a return to local authority structures but I think this approach is naïve as this is not a way of moving forward. PCCs are responsive and a local authority structure isn't flexible enough to address the tension between local issues and some very complex regional and national needs, such as counter terrorism and public order, which the police have an obligation to meet.

[Bob Jones](#), West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner (Labour)

The Stevens report, which follows a two year independent review of policing, recommends that Police and Crime Commissioners should be replaced. This raises the very valid question: with what do you replace them?



I think there are much better models. Even simply reverting to the previous police authority model would be better: given that the Home Secretary says her only measure of success is reducing crime, it is worth remembering that police authorities oversaw the biggest reduction in crime since records began. As I have often said, they had the most successful record in public administration since Birmingham MP Dennis Howell moved from being Minister for the Drought to Minister for Floods within days.

I would personally welcome a commitment to review the PCC role, which any objective observer would concede is [deeply flawed](#). Even the Americans, who historically adopted this model, have moved away from and replaced this particular structure. I would however caution against an election

commitment that substituted an alternative model. I would advise doing everything we can to build consensus and stability in how we support and scrutinise policing, possibly including a Royal Commission.

Adam Simmonds, Northamptonshire Police and Crime Commissioner (Conservative)

The Stevens report is yet another review of the police by a retired policeman. For policing to genuinely reform, a fresh and broader perspective is required. A review led by victims of crime, engaging crime scientists and covering the whole of community safety and criminal justice; now that would be worthwhile. Yet another review by a retired policeman reviewing the police is much less so.



This review doesn't give us anything new. The core arguments in terms of social justice and a broader civic role for the police are right, but they have been around for decades. So has recognition of the fundamental importance of a locally-driven community policing model. The debates about governance, structure, standards and profession are likewise nothing new and this particular report sheds little fresh insight on any of them.

On the specific issue of achieving a direct voice for the public in policing, the case for change from the PCC arrangements is simply not made by Stevens. The report is muddled: on the one hand, it dismisses a return to a 'Police Authority' made up (in the majority) of local councillors to instead produce a 'Policing Board' made up of local councillors. This is back to the future stuff: back to the tired well-worn committee model largely out of the public eye. Much easier for the policing profession to control, and much less able to challenge and change the profession's thinking. Much harder for the public to recognise and engage with.

Vera Baird QC, Northumbria Police and Crime Commissioner (Labour)

Lord Stevens highlights that the government repeatedly refers to police as "Crime Fighters" when his experience reflects mine, that the public want to make Neighbourhood Policing even better, to tackle what he calls "the social purpose of policing" working as partners with local communities to improve safety, prevent crime and disorder and to solve neighbourhood problems.



Neighbourhood policing is a great success story here in Northumbria and as Stevens says it is under threat from Government rhetoric which seems to encourage a retreat into "a discredited model of reactive policing" and it is also under threat from excessive and unnecessary government cuts.

As Police and Crime Commissioner, I am committed to speaking up for the residents of Northumbria – it is imperative that the public have someone they can hold to account for policing in their area. Any future model of police governance should move forward along the lines of accountability and democracy and not backwards to indirectly nominated representation which de-professionalises the service.

Christopher Salmon, Dyfed-Powys Police and Crime Commissioner (Conservative)

I welcome any contribution to the debate about policing but, let's be clear, Lord Stevens' report is not independent. It was commissioned by the Labour Party and it will be for them to be judged by its contents. We've heard a lot about radicalism but most of it sounds years out of date.



We all agree that local activity is the bedrock of British policing. That's why we're bringing forward the recruitment of officers in Dyfed-Powys and investing in neighbourhood policing. We will take on 90 new officers in the next 18 months – 30 of those being new posts.

The Stevens Report provides the wrong answers to the right questions. More laws, more central diktats and clumsy legal obligations that drag police from their core mission are not the answer. That's what the Stevens proposals for force mergers, the IPCC and College of Policing mean – a massive centralisation of power.

We should be even more suspicious when those hands are senior officers' hands, where he proposes to remove any shred of democratic control. That's what gave us the problems we have today. It may not be surprising that an ex-senior officer is recommending more power for his old colleagues.

Ann Barnes, Kent Police and Crime Commissioner (Independent)

I welcome Lord Stevens' report which at last opens up a national debate about the future of the Police Service. What really strikes me is that finally someone on the national stage has at least recognised the importance of neighbourhood policing – the bedrock of policing here in Kent.



It's something that we started here a long time ago and as Commissioner, I'm determined to keep this going. The report highlights how important neighbourhood policing is but it doesn't actually look at how it can be delivered with the loss of hundreds of officers. Rather than being 'bold' and 'radical' the report actually takes us back to the good old fashion values of community policing, which I know from my visits around Kent are what the public wants to see.

I read with interest Lord Stevens' vision on future governance and scrapping the role of Commissioners. I looked closely for his so-called 'evidence' to back up his sweeping statements, but sadly found very little. The reality is there will always be some form of governance holding police forces to account and there will always be a cost attached to this. It is for the House of Commons to decide on the method, but I do feel strongly that going back to the old ways of Police Committees so soon would be a mistake. It is always very tempting to get rid of new systems which take time to establish, no matter what organisation you are in, but changing structures forward and back is not the answer to a quality national police service either. The cost behind constant change to the public purse is quite brutal, especially at a time when the county financially is still struggling.

Democratic Audit will publish a follow-up post next week featuring responses from academic experts. For further discussion of the election and role of Police and Crime Commissioners on Democratic Audit please [click here](#).

Reactions to the review's proposals from [Charlotte McLeod](#) and [Tim Newburn](#) can also be found on the LSE British Politics and Policy blog.

Note: This post represents the views of the authors, and does not give the position of Democratic Audit or the London School of Economics. Please read our comments policy before commenting. Shortlink for this post: <http://buff.ly/18K5Nzf>

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